

Senator Scott Kawasaki,
Chair of the Alaska Senate Committee on State Affairs
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 23
May 2, 2023

Senate Committee Members of State Affairs,

The Policing Project is pleased to offer support for SB 23, “An Act relating to the duties of the Alaska Police Standards Council...” The Policing Project at NYU School of Law is an organization dedicated to ensuring transparent, effective, and ethical policing. In order to achieve these goals, the public must be democratically involved in setting expectations for police practices *before* police act, instead of *after* something has gone wrong. The Policing Project has drafted model legislation that provides clear standards on how and when police can use force. It is based on that work that we submit this testimony and urge the committee to recommend the bill for passage.

Police officers are the only government employees tasked with carrying guns and sanctioned to use force against people in the community. Yet despite the seriousness of use of force incidents, many states lack statutes to ensure adequate data collection on use of force. If lawmakers and the public do not have even the most basic information about what their local police do, it is incredibly difficult to address excessive force incidents, to identify racial disproportionality, and to improve the state of policing in Alaska.

We urge the committee to consider this as the first step in comprehensive use of force reform. For example, sixteen states collect use of force data from all police agencies. Alaska is not one of those states. Currently, there is no central database that tracks instances of use of force Alaska. And while there are some agencies within the state that report uses of force and send those reports to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, not all do.

SB 23 will ensure that *all* instances when use of force was used will be sent to the Department of Public Safety to be entered into a central registry and sent to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for data collection. While this central registry will not be accessible to the public, it will create more transparency among agencies so that officers who have had certification denied or revoked are not hired.

These “wandering officers” are those who is fired by one law enforcement agency and then get hired by another law enforcement agency, or adjacent field, often because of a lack of information or transparency. Unfortunately, this phenomenon has occurred in Alaska when decertified Sitka city police Officer Dale Hanson, fired for excessive force and perjured testimony, was rehired by the Sitka Police Department. A centralized database will help prevent decertified officers from finding new jobs in law enforcement and engaging in further misconduct.

In summary, we hope this committee will advance SB 23, and are happy to provide any additional information that would be useful.